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Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis, eds., *Views from the Margins: Creating Identities in Modern France*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2008. 277 pp. \$31.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8032-1559-7.

Review by Matthew Matsuda, Rutgers University.

*Views from the Margins* is nothing if not a bold enterprise. After all, the first sentence leading off this collection of nine essays is the reflexive question, “What constitutes Frenchness?” Addressing such an ambitious inquiry has been the hallmark of modern French historiography, from Jules Michelet to Adolphe Thiers, Fernand Braudel and Pierre Nora. Callahan and Curtis, as editors, have sought an answer by pulling together a wide-ranging team of collaborators, with research pieces ranging from Napoleonic France to Vichy, and subjects focusing on missionaries, consumerism, regional heritage initiatives, left and right struggles, intellectuals, gender politics, and family histories.

As befits a contemporary sensibility, Callahan and Curtis have not sought to incarnate French identity in any particular tradition, cultural adherence, or set of linguistic and geographical affiliations. Their approach is more post-national in examining sites and places rather than constituted identities. In this, they push away from unpacking canonical heritage references to excavating the role of supposedly marginal peripheries in constituting histories of the core. The project is founded on tension. It looks toward a chronicle of “greater France that truly integrates center and periphery,” including “the ways in which peripheral identities and events shaped and created French policies at the center that were then transmitted back to the periphery” (p. 3).

As an organizing device, the articulation of core and periphery works more and less effectively across the essays. Those that have geopolitical subjects-- Guiana, Gabon, Indochina, Rhône-Alpes, or Alsace, for example--use the dyad directly, parsing out the ways in which unique individuals established themselves in imperial situations, colonial enterprises erased their labor regimes on the ground, and regional and municipal authorities in French territories rallied themselves against the tyranny of Paris and French cultural hegemony. Other essays use the idea of core and periphery more metaphorically, to suggest any number of normative distinctions--gender differences, political and ideological divisions, family “values” and personal intimacies.

The editors recognize the distinctly different connections of the first set of essays as compared to the latter, and indeed organize the pieces in different sections. The first deals with mission and overseas work, a second with regional politics, another with ideology and intellectuals, and a fourth with family and gender questions. The themes are never forced, though admittedly they do at times read as merely convenient, categorical devices to hold together disparate research pieces by claiming them all as intellectually coherent.

This approach is at times a stretch. The commonality of identity “creation” (deliberately counterposed to contestation or construction) allows a richness to the essays, and a compelling

argument that Frenchness exists only historically, and is a shifting entity constantly created. The articulation of this idea has strengths and weaknesses. Some of the overall general propositions are, for French historians, so unobjectionable as to be commonplace, as “All things French are not located in Paris or the product of a centralized state...” (p. 14). Perhaps this truism is addressed to students; it certainly will puzzle other scholars. In this way, *Margins* seems less a collection on the crest of a *nouvelle vague* than a sort of summing up of the state of the profession, an overview of “Francopohone,” “borderlands,” “global,” and “decentered” studies of the last decades.

The strength of the collection is the way its “margins” project is given weight. By and large, the authors avoid large statements on capitalism, imperialism, or socialism and instead dig deep into the work of historians: the archival materials of experience, at times with an almost ethnographic richness.

Sarah Curtis’ “Missionary Utopias” looks at the work of Sister Anne Marie Javouhey and her dominating presence in Mana, Guiana. Javouhey built a utopian religious colony that integrated the teaching of moral uplift and enlightenment with small-holder agrarian production, challenging the Catholic hierarchy and planters fearful of organized slave insurrections. The “margins” idea works well here, showing how unique individuals could be both morally conservative and socially progressive, inculcating doctrinaire messages while breaking with strong colonial and religious institutions. As a woman, Javouhey challenged the Church’s paternalistic authority, while establishing herself as the center of a “maternalist” experiment in colonial governance.

Jeremy Rich’s “Marcel Lefebvre in Gabon” follows thematically from the religious and colonial contexts and is also centered upon religious questions, but in this case underscores the reinforcement of conservative views through rather masculinist narrations. Concerned about modernity, and fractures and shifts brought about by European war, labor strife, and political unrest, Lefebvre attempted to constitute and fortify his notions of French religious presence by relying on the heroic narrative of missions. The Catholic past in the colonies would be the foundation of a “national revolution” in France, reflected in “(c)elebratory images of tough minded French priests guarding their flocks” and “a Catholic identity that went beyond the boundaries of Europe.” This would herald a Christian renewal with global impact. In this, he acknowledged that “(s)ecular colonization had failed, but Lefebvre hoped his supporters would act in France in the same way that he labored in Gabon.” This latter is the critical point: the model for Christian change would come from the colonies, rather than the other way around, redefining “marginality” (pp. 72-73).

Stephen Harp’s “Marketing in the Metropole” maintains the colonial setting of the first two essays and, like Lefebvre’s Christendom, seeks out the self-representations of overarching and transnational institutions—in this case, the commercial capitalism of the Michelin industrial company and its heroic self-representation. Harp looks at colonial Indochina, the global frontier of French business, and the erasure of the labor exaction system that was disguised by the leisure, country-driving, and gourmand imaginaries of Michelin by way of its rubber tires and dining guides. Harp’s key point, and a good observation, is that the consumer and leisure regimes imagined by Michelin were not built upon a flight from reality, but in fact built on that reality: geopolitical and geoeconomic, characterized by indentured servitude, labor unrest, and struggles over communist infiltrations in Indochina, whether real or imagined (p. 86).

Lee Whitfield’s “Exorcising Algeria” continues this idea of colonial domination by focusing on Algeria, but reads that land through the lens of local politics in the hexagon itself, bringing empire back home to the Rhône Alpes. Whitfield focuses on the ways that local and

international politics can intertwine to redefine the political history of decolonization. Not unexpectedly, parallels arise between the borderland regions of European France and those of France's Algerian territory. In fact, the fates of the two become inseparable, such that the "public in the Rhône-Alpes rejected the unconscionable and irrational war policy to defend French imperial identity." What follows, though, is the telling point: "Instead, municipal politicians, businessmen and women, and diverse civic leaders refashioned their own French national identity rooted in regional pride and revival" (p. 110). The margins of overseas empire become the concerns of borderlands in European France, in a complex tale of lost tourism, inflation, small shopkeepers hard hit by policies of war, the rise of the populist Pierre Poujade, and trials over war crimes. As with the earlier essays on religion, here again is a struggle by distant-from-Paris actors to rebuild a French identity based on local pride and economic development.

Samuel Huston Goodfellow's "Autonomy or Colony," takes up the borderlands theme, again on the eastern frontier, by looking at Alsace as a place pulled between Paris and Berlin but ultimately asserting its own identity, neither French nor German, nor simply an integration of the two, but a region with an autonomous claim on history. Conflicts particularly between French and German educational systems mark this study, as well as the gradual recognition of Alsatian language and culture as unique. The story follows the political chronology of the region, with special focus on the demonstrations of 1924 and the rejection of French anticlerical laws in favor of adherence to local religious practice, as well as an insightful examination of Karl Roos, the Action Française, and the ways that liberal and Marxist parties for too long ignored the importance of regionalism as driving factors in cultural politics (p. 150). As Goodfellow points out, the right instead looked to the Nation, and also the Church, and in this presaged some of the subsequent fascist successes at cultivating local traditions as bases for grounding identity questions.

Kevin Callahan's "The 'True' French Worker Party" indicates its project in the title--the identification of "true" identity through politics. The history of the French Left was the story of multiple margins, notoriously unstable through the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of fractures within the French alliances themselves. Trying to account for the workers' parties, anarchists, socialist federations, social democrats, and revolutionary socialists, both Marxist and non-Marxist, is a dizzying tale. The groups were sectarian, moving from control of procedure and platform debates at socialist international congresses, to their realignment in the context of the Dreyfus Affair. Jaurès joined the fray over French and German hostilities, Guesde and other Marxists separated, controversies reigned about whether left parties ought to align with bourgeois governments. As Callahan concludes, the sectarian nature of the left resulted, not from "the actions of a heavy-handed center seeking to impose uniformity or assert a "German hegemony," but from "impromptu efforts to prevent further deterioration of internecine strife within the French Left" (p. 18).

At this point, the essays fall into a distinctively different thematic organization, both temporally and in terms of the greater metaphorical, rather than literal, weight of the use of the ideas of core, periphery, identity, and margins. Sean Quinlan's "Sex and the Citizen" shifts back in chronology to the Napoleonic period and examines a cultural ideology of the republic--or empire--of letters, constituting itself through scientific advice. Notably, these are still debates over ideology, but here displaced into morality: "sex and domestic hygiene to attain specific ideological agendas" (p.190). In these instances, the focus is on sex and child-rearing as politics. This returns to a theme we have seen before: struggles that "connected sex and domestic hygiene with revolutionary regeneration" (p. 193). Couched in debates about preformation (the whole realized in virtual form) and epigenesis (suggesting organic development needing no

creator), the controversies inflected the sciences of biology and nurture and whether the French Revolution had regenerated “the nation’s health” in the breeding of virtuous citizens (p. 201).

Anne Epstein’s “Gender and the Creation of the French Intellectual” has a similar corporeal theme, interrogating the male character of the intellectual. As with French Left discussions, the Dreyfus Affair comes up again. Here it is aimed at understanding, not only socialists and political alliances, but also the moral authority of the engaged intellectual as the modern man of letters. Epstein’s insight is to point out how the “moral” aspects of authority were highly gendered, with distinctive qualities and roles adhering to male and female actors. Men had the key institutions of clubs, publishing, and politics, yet women were charged in republican ideology with the education and upbringing of children, self-representing as “mother, Frenchwoman, and Christian” (p. 225). Reading through work collaborations at the *Revue de Morale Sociale*, Epstein points out that the Dreyfusard was male, but demands for legal and social reforms and international cooperation were based on the presumed imperatives of both male and female. Women were thus active creators of the identity of the “public intellectual” (p. 239).

Rachel Fuchs’ “Family Dramas” also examines male and female roles, in this case through everyday intimacies. Defying the “good mother” or moral teacher imaginary, Fuchs’ studies family ideology through an examination of the many fractured families, single parents, and the various elective affinities, such as divorce and adultery, that pulled together individuals for intimate, economic, or purely pragmatic and legal reasons. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, Fuchs looks at divorced couples, women seeking support, and more generally lives at the limits of social and legal marginalization. Lucienne Hilleret, divorced, struggles for legal recognition of her rights to support from a previous marriage. Jean and Henri Victoire are tied together by a paternity suit, while dealing with the material hardships of the Occupation. Suzanne Duprès petitions for resources to survive using hand-delivered letters. For all, the questions of “history” came from a tenuous and constantly shifting web of promises, entreaties, legal judgments, and negotiations that formed a relationship to France. All of these cases played against an imaginary French bourgeois grouping of “ideal families...strong, secure, and calm, glorifying both fatherhood and motherhood,” thus connecting with the previous essays (p. 269).

In all, *Margins* is a good teaching volume for upper-division French history classes and scholars looking to move beyond the canon. It features both a theoretical and discursive facility with peripheries, and also a solid collection of empirical casework studies and multiple episodes to draw upon in shaping the parameters of what the outlines of France should be.

Taken this way, the collection makes the perfectly salutary claim that “views from the margins are well worth appreciating in understanding the dynamic nature of French identity” (p. 15). The editors have taken a number of contributions and given them a smart model to follow. All of the essays have been editorially shaped in concise, compelling ways: carefully excavated cases, and in every instance, a precise capsule history and chronological context for the episodes that unfold—critical in that this collection which ranges across the better part of three centuries and (as the authors and editors champion) largely away from Paris.

The “away from Paris” imperative means that the collection has a spatial orientation of thematic markers—self and other, core and periphery, centers and margins. Less is made of the temporal schemes of the essays and more could be done with this. One clear theme that might be underscored is the repeating invocation of evident social stasis, imminent collapse, and hoped-for renewal. One by one, the essays make regular commentaries on this question: the new worlds and revivalism of Christian faith with the missions; the regions drawing on their heritage traditions to provide models to counter the hegemony of Paris; intellectuals and

activists seeking new societies; the male and female bodies of writers and revolutionaries seeking to regenerate citizens, soldiers, and families into a new body politic.

Thus, along with the emphasis on cores and peripheries, and the reader would do well to draw on his or her own ideas about temporality--transformation, interruption, renewal--and how those are also critical arguments in these explorations. For a volume that travels, this also ought to be paired with works more directly concerning the peripatetic nature of marginal histories. Whether missionaries ministering in colonies, global rubber and consumerism, foreign wars brought home, international socialism, or divorced and displaced families, these are histories on the move. As individual studies, they are necessarily enclosed and distinct. Together they can be underscored through migrations, evacuations, indentures, diasporas, and itineraries. The chapters comprise places and points, yet never form a bounded territory. In that, they are marginal without occupying borders or peripheries themselves. In many ways, the end of this collection brings the margins to the center.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Kevin J. Callahan and Sarah A. Curtis, "Introduction"

Sarah Curtis, "Missionary Utopias: Anne-Marie Javouhey and the Colony at Mana, French Guiana, 1827-1848"

Jeremy Rich, "Marcel Lefebvre in Gabon: Revival, Missionaries, and the Colonial Roots of Catholic Traditionalism"

Stephen Harp, "Marketing in the Metropole: Colonial Rubber Plantations and French Consumerism in the Early Twentieth Century"

Lee Whitfield, "Exorcising Algeria: French Citizens, the War, and the Remaking of National Identity in the Rhône-Alpes, 1954-1962"

Samuel Huston Goodfellow, "Autonomy or Colony: The Politics of Alsace's Relationship to France in the Interwar Era"

Kevin Callahan, "The 'True' French Worker Party: The Problem of French Sectarianism and Identity Politics in the Second International, 1889-1900"

Sean Quinlan, "Sex and the Citizen: Reproductive Manuals and Fashionable Readers in Napoleonic France, 1799-1808"

Anne Epstein, "Gender and the Creation of the French Intellectual: The Case of the *Revue de Morale Sociale*, 1899-1903"

Rachel Fuchs, "Family Dramas: Paternity, Divorce, and Adultery, 1917-1945"

"The writings of William B. Cohen"

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